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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001594

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [KAWC](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: MFA GOES PUBLIC ON IMPENDING TRANSFER OF BAHRAINI
GTMO DETAINEES

REF: A. MANAMA 1553 B. SECSTATE 199146 C. MANAMA 1547

Classified By: Ambassador William T.Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

11. (U) Unidentified "sources" at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told the Bahraini press on October 30 that some of the six Bahrainis detained at Guantanamo would return to Bahrain shortly, possibly over the upcoming Eid holidays. This story became a lead front-page news in both the English and Arabic press on October 31, with extensive reporting on how the detainees might be handled upon their return and interviews with families of all six detainees as well as their American lawyer and a human rights activist. One article quoted a senior official as saying the returned detainees would be turned over to the Bahraini authorities so that they could be sent to their respective families, and doubting that they would be tried or placed under house arrest. Another source was quoted as saying that, although the returned detainees would not necessarily be held in prison by the Bahraini authorities, there would be a security arrangement or agreement between the government and the detainees. The source did not give specific details, but said it would include conditions and certification that the returned detainees not resume any communications or connections with any group associated with Al-Qaida or other terrorist movements.

12. (U) Relatives of all six detainees expressed joy at the news of the possible return of their family members, but worried whether their own family member would be in this group coming back. American lawyer Joshua Colangelo-Bryan said he had not heard of the impending release, but would not have expected the USG to inform him in any event. A Foreign Ministry source said that the release of the detainees from Guantanamo was the result of "strenuous efforts" by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior as well as the families' attorneys. Nabeel Rajab of the now-dissolved Bahrain Center for Human Rights also claimed credit for applying pressure that led to the release. A representative of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society, apparently miffed at also not being able to claim credit, called the Embassy to complain that the Ambassador had not informed them of the impending return in a meeting earlier this month (ref C).

13. (C) The Embassy first learned that the MFA had gone public with the news of the impending return when it was called for comment by the press on the evening of October 30. The Ambassador immediately called Minister of Information/Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Mohammed Abdul Ghaffar (our point person on the detainees) as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Khalid Al-Khalifa to register concern that premature release of information about the transfer could create legal complications that could jeopardize the transfer. Shaikh Khalid said that the decision to release information about the return was made on the margins of the October 30 Cabinet meeting. The public pressure to get results on the Bahraini detainees had just grown too great, and the leadership felt it had to say something.

14. (C) The Ambassador took the opportunity to impress upon Shaikh Khalid the importance of handling the detainees in a way that, consistent with our exchange of notes, ensured that the returned detainees were prevented from posing a continuing threat. Before returning them to their families, for example, it was essential that they be fully questioned. If no charges were to be brought, it was important for the government to develop a system of monitoring and surveillance. It is in our strong mutual interest that any returned detainees not be discovered renewing contacts with terrorist elements or engaging in terrorist-related activities. Shaikh Khalid assured that the Government of Bahrain shared that view, and would put in place systems to prevent that from happening.

15. (C) The issue of the returning detainees was also discussed in an October 31 meeting between the Ambassador and Deputy Prime Minister (and former Foreign Minister) Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa. Shaikh Mohammed said that the whole town was talking about the possible return of the detainees. The Ambassador raised concerns about press reporting from unidentified sources suggesting that the detainees would not be tried or put under house arrest. He

cautioned that Washington will be watching closely how the Bahraini detainees' return is handled. He passed a copy of the diplomatic note outlining USG conditions for the transfer (ref B), and stressed the importance of developing a system whereby the detainees are interrogated, monitored, and rehabilitated on their return. The worst thing that could happen, he stated, would be to learn that they were in contact with suspected terrorist elements in Bahrain or elsewhere. Shaikh Mohammed pledged that the government would take all steps necessary to prevent that possibility.

16. (C) The Ambassador raised his concern that the detainees' return could result in their being treated as heroes. These are not benign individuals, he noted. Shaikh Mohammed responded that, even if some Bahrainis support them, they are a minority voice and do not represent the majority opinion. He concluded by saying that Bahrain does not want to see new groups breeding in Bahrain. "We need to keep our eye on all these elements," he stated.

17. (C) Comment: The MFA's decision to release information about the planned upcoming return of three of the six Bahraini detainees in the coming days comes in the context of a steady barrage of press reporting of alleged mistreatment of one of Bahrain's detainees, Juma al-Dossari (not one of the three approved for release), beginning on October 19 and continuing regularly since then (ref A). These articles have only intensified the clamor from the press, parliamentarians, and NGOs for a return of the detainees. Concern over the detainees has even led to a rare criticism of the U.S. Navy's presence in Bahrain. An op-ed writer on October 31 called departing Admiral Nichols' recent press statement that the Fifth Fleet had no intention of leaving Bahrain bad news for Bahrain because, while the U.S. uses Bahrain to protect its interests, Bahrain has not been able to use its good relations with the U.S. to get its detainees back.

18. (C) Comment continued. The Ambassador, in recent meetings and discussions with Minister of Interior Shaikh Rashid, DPM Shaikh Mohammed, Minister of Foreign Affairs Shaikh Khalid, and MFA Minister of State Abdul Ghaffar, has stressed the importance of handling the detainees in a way that prevents them from becoming a threat once again. All officials have given their assurances that they will do so, while acknowledging that they face certain legal and resource constraints that make it difficult to hold them for any length of time, prosecute, and provide continuous surveillance and monitoring. Embassy's best guess is that the GOB will detain the returning detainees for the up to 48 hours allowed under Bahrain law without charges, release them to their families, and embark on a program of rehabilitation and calibrated monitoring to ensure that they don't go astray.
MONROE